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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a series of assignments called "Internet Explorations," which were developed for an introductory public relations course. The three rationales for the assignments in the paper were illustration and application of course concepts to ongoing public relations activities, student exposure to communication strategies, and structured online experiences which involved new technological public relations tactics. The four assignments, entitled: "Exploring PR History"; "Organizations and Key Publics"; "Communities, Governments, and Activists"; and "Organizations and Crises," were distributed via email. Benefits of the assignments included increased classroom discussion quality and connection with current events. An appendix contains sample handouts of the four assignments, including several Web site links used for the assignments. (EF)

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Internet Explorations:
On-line assignments for the Introductory Public Relations Course

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Internet Explorations:
On-line Assignments for the Introductory Public Relations Course

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On Tuesday, April 20, 1999, the tragic shooting at Columbine High School unfolded on our TV screens. By the morning of Wednesday, April 21, students in my Principles of Public Relations class were watching the Jefferson County School District's response unfold on their computer monitors as we began to talk about crisis communication. In class, students discussed their own reaction to the incident as observers a continent away and applied the principles of crisis management to the Jefferson County Communication team's messages over the following two weeks.

My students' use of the World Wide Web during this incident powerfully demonstrated the real-world pertinence of classroom principles. Watching communication professionals cope with this tragedy helped students understand the role of clear thinking and cogent communication for those who manage an organization's public relations. Coincidentally, it also reinforced the utility of the series of assignments called "Internet Explorations," which I developed that semester.

The World Wide Web has emerged as one of the most rapidly adopted educational technologies in history. Its use in facilitating interaction and collaboration has been the subject of scholarly and popular commentary. In addition to its use as a teaching tool, familiarity with organizational uses of the Web develops skills highly valued by employers.

This paper describes a series of assignments called "Internet Explorations," which were developed for an introductory public relations course. This paper explores the

rationale and goals for the assignments, describes the process by which they were integrated into the class, a description of the assignments themselves, and an assessment of the assignments' success.

Rationale/Purpose of "Internet Explorations" Assignment

The Internet Explorations assignments served three purposes for the class. First, they illustrated course concepts and allowed the students to apply them, in most cases, to ongoing public relations activities of organizations. Instructors often attempt to develop relevant class examples. These assignments were timely explorations of organizations' public relations strategies. Web sites also package information in a way that students find entertaining. This was an important consideration, especially for the course unit on public relations history, usually not one of the students' favorite topics.

A second, related, rationale for the assignment was to expose students to dynamic communication strategies. This might be referred to as "PR in action." Most cases, especially those found in introductory textbooks, often look at a single organization's public relations efforts. While often illustrative, textbook cases have two shortcomings. First, cases often are dated by the time the textbook reaches the shelves. If the case had no clear resolution, it is up to the students and instructor to fill in "the rest of the story." Second, the cases tend to be unidirectional in nature. That is, they represent one organization's response to a situation, often underreporting or ignoring opposing viewpoints. Using the World Wide Web to examine organizations on both sides of a controversy allows students to see how messages clash, how different tactics either fuel or resolve conflicts, and how the organizations seek to gain support for their viewpoints

from various publics. Moreover, if the Web site is well maintained, students can view the evolution of messages over time.

The third rationale for the assignments is that they structure students' online experience while introducing them to new technological tactics in public relations. The shortcomings of the World Wide Web as an unwieldy source of accurate information have been widely acknowledged, despite its reputation as a repository for countless bits of easily accessible information. If students are given assignments that ask them to "surf" the Web for information, they often waste time finding the information, or find information of little use. In the Internet Explorations, I selected Web sites that best illustrated the ideas we discussed in class, which structured the students' search. The assignment had the additional benefit of exposing students to organizations' use of one of the most powerful public relations mediums yet developed. Much of the material was found in organizations' online "press rooms," an innovation an increasing number of journalists prefer. Students saw good Web pages, and they saw bad ones. They experienced the same frustration end-users experience when they attempt to visit a website whose designers spent too much time developing the bells and whistles and not enough time worrying about whether visitors could download the pages over slow connections, or understand the content once the page was opened. In sum, they acquired some technological sophistication as well as an understanding of how that technology might be applied to communicating with publics.

Integrating the Internet Explorations

I developed four different Internet Exploration assignments (see Appendix A for a more complete description of each assignment):

1. Exploring PR History
2. Organizations and Key Publics
3. Communities, Governments, and Activists
4. Organizations and Crises

The assignments were classified as homework for the course, and constituted 20 percent of the students' final grade.[1]

Each assignment was distributed via email to the class, using a group email list developed on Lotus Notes. This method of distribution helped improve students' use of technology (some in this class still were not email literate). I also was able to verify that students had received the homework, even if they had missed class the day it was assigned. The email program also allowed me to send "hot links" imbedded in the email message. Depending on their email package, students simply had to click on the URL link in their messages and a web browser would open the Web site for them.

In each assignment, I asked students questions that attempted to make them apply course concepts to the messages found in the various Web pages. I also asked students to judge whether they thought the organization's strategies or messages were effective, and to provide a justification for their answer. Occasionally, I asked them about the aesthetics of the Web pages they explored.

The answers to the questions took the form of a 500-700-word essay. The students were graded on the extent to which they accurately and thoroughly used course concepts, the thoughtfulness of their responses, and the quality of their writing. Students submitted the assignments either via email or through paper copies. Personally, the

thought of reading 30 online papers did not excite me, so I often opted for traditional paper copies.

The Assignments

While a complete description of the assignments can be found later in the paper, I would like to share some of my thinking behind their development.

Exploring PR History: This assignment grew out of my belief that current public relations practice--and some of the negative public opinion associated with it--is partially understood by looking at significant events in PR history. This assignment asked the students to focus on three pioneers of modern PR practice: Edward Bernays, Ivy Lee, and Arthur Page.

The PR Museum's website contained the most valuable sources of information for Bernays and Page, the objects of two of the Museum's "exhibits." For Bernays, the exhibit covered the length of his storied career. While somewhat complimentary, it also covered his association with tobacco companies in the 1920s and 30s (and his later condemnation of tobacco companies' practices), as well as his push for licensure in the 1980s and 90s.

The Ivy Lee site at Princeton was primarily designed as a catalogue of the university's collection of Lee's papers. However, it featured a thorough biography of Lee's work, including the work for which he earned the sobriquet "Poison Ivy." Another site featured Lee's Declaration of Principles, some of which still form the basis for media relations.

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[1] In addition to the Internet Explorations, the class featured two other non-Internet homework assignments (PR in the Media and PR Perceptions). Additionally, students completed a research paper, a "meet a professional" interview paper, and three exams.

Organizations and Publics: Many introductory public relations courses (and textbooks) use categories of important publics (employees, investors, consumers, and the community) as a way to organize the course content. When designing this assignment, I chose organizations that either had a good reputation for dealing with these publics, or were currently experiencing some challenge.

For example, Levi Strauss has an excellent reputation for employee relations and community involvement. However, the company announced a major reduction in force in February, 1999. My students had learned about corporations and communities as well as some of the major employee relations challenges. Exploring Levi's site allowed them to see how a major company balances its conflicting responsibilities among employees, investors, and the communities affected by corporate decision making.

Communities, Governments, and Activists: In class we discussed the current PR trend in which organizations not only promote themselves to their communities, but communities also are promoting themselves to organizations. Additionally, we discussed the range of public affairs activities undertaken by local, state, and national levels of government. Finally, we covered the role of activists and their relationship to issue management, organizations, and government public policy debates.

Because of the wide-ranging nature of these discussions, this became a hodge-podge assignment. Students could choose from among three options. The common thread with each was that students had to focus on issues and the way in which the government office, activist organization, or individual communicated about issues.

For example, since this was a Spring semester course, the Internal Revenue Service seemed like an interesting site to visit. This was particularly true since the IRS

had undertaken a significant image makeover in the wake of accusations that employees had been encouraged to harass taxpayers. The IRS website featured the "Digital Daily," which was an attempt to make the agency more "customer" friendly, and which provided helpful tips for filing last-minute tax returns.

The second option was to explore the web pages of activists. This was particularly interesting, since some of the activists were raising issues about organizations explored in the "Organizations and Key Publics" homework assignment. For example, Nike was the object of a campaign by Global Exchange over the shoemaker's overseas labor practices. I also selected organizations that had been in the news during that semester, most notably the American Association of Retired Persons and the National Rifle Association (which the students revisited following the Columbine tragedy). Finally, the U.S. intervention in Kosovo prompted me to include the Pax Christi USA website, one of the few anti-war voices during this time.

The third option was inspired by the fact that several candidates through their hats (and Web sites) into the ring for a run in the 2000 presidential election. The list was long at this point, and included everyone from Al Gore and George W. Bush to Dan Quayle. Some of the Web sites were still being developed, especially since several of the candidates had not officially announced that they were running. Nevertheless, students were asked to look for the issues or issue agendas developed by these candidates, and to predict whether these issues would enable the candidate to win public opinion.

In the future, I will most likely break this assignment into at least two smaller ones: one devoted to activists and organizations, and the other devoted to communities and government public affairs.

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Organizations and Crises Homework: Crisis communication is one of the more visible public relations activities, although it constitutes only a small portion of the ongoing work in PR. However, when a crisis develops, the communication resources and capabilities of an organization are sorely tested. In the long run, an organization's reputation and the lives of its employees and key publics may be affected by its response to a crisis.

In developing this assignment, I had originally planned to have students examine organizations that already had experienced a crisis. Then Columbine exploded, and the full capabilities of the Internet as a communication tool were realized.

Initial press reports indicated that the Jefferson County School District officials were making statements available to the media via the district's Web site. After a little searching, I discovered the site and the opportunity to watch a model effort at controlling information in a crisis.

The first message, a statement from the school district superintendent, was posted only a few hours after the first shots were fired. Over the next several days, regular updates were posted. These updates covered the various informational needs, including those of:

- The media (e.g., condition of victims, resources for media interviews),
- Victims' families (phone numbers for crisis counselors, funeral homes, and transportation for out of town mourners)
- Other Columbine students and their families (arrangements for classes to resume at other district schools)

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- And supporters from around the country (places to send donations, ways to post tributes at the on-line "tribute center").

The regular updates made the assignment somewhat challenging for students, since what was on the Web site at one point in the week before the assignment was due had changed as the deadline approached.

The only thing that students were not able to gain from evaluating the Columbine site was a sense of how organizations recover from crises, and the messages they use to re-invent their image. For this, the students could turn to Amtrak's Web site. The rail carrier had experienced an accident on its *Spirit of New Orleans* run, in which the train struck a truck in Illinois, derailed, and caught fire. Several people were killed. We had discussed the accident in class earlier in the semester, and approximately two months had passed by the time the students reviewed Amtrak's communication during this period.

Assessment

As with any new pedagogical endeavor, the Internet Explorations assignments produced both positive and negative results. The generally positive assessment of the assignment was judged by feedback on student evaluations, quality of class discussion, and comments from students outside of class.

The student evaluations generally rated the assignments highly. Out of 30 evaluations, approximately 20 contained positive comments regarding the assignments. These comments included:

- "homework allowed me to apply class material"
- "I liked looking up presidential candidates"

- "The crisis homework helped me understand how public relations works in a tragic situation."

In response to the question "Would you include this assignment in future classes?." most students wrote "yes."

More significant to the classroom experience was the increased quality of classroom discussion. I usually spent time on the days the Internet Explorations essays were due to ask students what they found most intriguing about the public relations activities they explored. The discussion ranged from the aesthetics of Web site design to the nature of the conflict between organizations and activists. More importantly, the discussion reflected a greater understanding of the principles of public relations. Students made the connections between principle and practice.

A final, less tangible, benefit was that students felt connected to events around them. This was particularly true of the Columbine tragedy. Students came to class the Wednesday following Columbine stunned that it could happen, afraid that it might happen to them, and somewhat powerless to do anything about it. But by witnessing how the communication staff of the Jefferson County Schools responded to the tragedy--doing their job in the face of overwhelming grief--the students were able to begin to put the event in perspective. Less dramatically, the Internet Exploration assignments opened new avenues through which students could understand the environment into which they would soon enter. After the first assignment, for example, when an organization or person experienced a PR problem, students would bring that to class for discussion, usually started by "I visited the XYZ Company's Web site, and their statement was..."

This demonstrated the willingness and ability to discover information and critically evaluate it.

The Internet Explorations were not without their drawbacks. First, as with any on-line course application, the assignments took some time to develop and test. Finding Web sites with the proper combination of ease of use, downloading capability, and evidence of class concepts took some time. Second, the text used in the class, like many other current textbooks, offered little guidance for evaluating the PR uses of Web technology.[2] Third, students sometimes went to the wrong Web sites. One student, for example, angrily complained that Al Gore's website was nothing but a place to buy "cheap merchandise." Upon examining the URL he used, I discovered that he had actually gone to a presidential memorabilia site, not the official Al Gore for President page. Finally, the dynamic nature of communication on the Web meant that students often got different information from a site depending on when they visited it. In some cases, it paid to procrastinate, as organizations often updated their sites with more interesting information. It also meant that occasionally I received two student papers that made contradictory observations about the messages they found. As a point of fact, they were both correct. Constant monitoring of the sites was essential to verifying the students' claims.

In sum, the Internet Explorations assignment seemed to achieve its goals. This particular semester, it had the added benefit of connecting students to one of the most tragic events in late 20th-century America. Toward the end of the semester and at the class's urging, I emailed a note to the Columbine High School crisis Web site email

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[2] The textbook used in the class was Wilcox, Dennis L., Phillip H. Ault, and Warren K Agee, *Public Relations: Strategies and Tactics* (3rd ed.). New York: Longman, 1998.

address. My students had expressed admiration at the fortitude and professionalism demonstrated by the communication staff during the crisis, and I felt it was appropriate that the Jefferson County staff heard that kind of support and feedback.

Several weeks later, I received a note from Rick Kaufman, Executive Director of Public Engagement and Communication Services for the Jefferson County School District. It read, in part: "Your email during the Columbine crisis was truly uplifting. I was moved that others saw the good we were doing in the face of such tragic consequences...God bless and keep the faith!"

The Internet Exploration assignment not only helped students learn, it helped connect them in profound ways to their profession and other professionals.

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Appendix A

COM 307

Exploring PR History Homework

20 points

Background: As mentioned in class, the past is prologue to the present (and the future) in PR. The way in which PR has been practiced historically has set the stage for how people think of the profession today. This is particularly true when you look at the notable figures in PR history. This assignment allows you to explore the contributions and controversies surrounding three pioneers in the field.

Process: You are to choose 1 of these 3 figures: Ivy Lee, Arthur Page, Edward Bernays. Using the World Wide Web links below, you are to read some more about these people.

In reviewing the information below, you should answer the following:

In your opinion, what was the person's single most important contribution to the field of PR.

What do you think today's organizations can learn from this contribution?

From the information provided, do you think the person did anything to harm the PR field's reputation?

Product: You should write a brief essay (no longer than 500 words) that addresses the questions above. Note that the answers to these questions are somewhat subjective. Therefore, you will be graded on the quality of your reasoning in support of your answer, the accuracy of the information used to support your view, and the clarity and quality of your writing.

The essay should be either emailed to me or turned in by class time on Monday, February 1. In class that day, be prepared to discuss what you found.

Resources and Links:

Please note: If your email supports hypertext, then you should be able to just click on the link below and be taken to the page. This did not work with the Ivy Lee/Princeton link. If your email does not support hypertext, you should cut and paste the link into your web browser or to another document so you can type them accurately into a web browser later.

Ivy Lee: The information on Lee is a little dry, but more complete than what is in the textbook. There are two sources for this information. The first is Lee's collection of papers at Princeton. Go to this link and follow it to Lee's biographical sketch.
http://infoshare1.princeton.edu:2003/libraries/firestone/rbsc/finding_aids/lee.html
The second link is to a student-created page from the Public Relations Student Society of America chapter at Ohio Northern University. You may want to explore this site a little, since it contains some student-oriented PR stuff.
http://www.onu.edu/org/prssa/ivylee.htm

Edward Bernays: The main link you should follow to explore Bernays is at the online Museum of Public Relations. Bernays was the subject of the first "exhibit."
http://www.prmuseum.com/
You may want to explore some of the other links on professionalism and licensing to give you a sense of one of the arguments in the field.

Arthur Page: There are two links for Page. The first is at the PR Museum, so you can follow the link listed above. The second link is to the Arthur W. Page Society, which is composed of top PR executives from around the country. This link takes you to the Society's home page. Follow the link for information "about the society." There is a brief bio on Page and a link to an essay written about his contributions to the field.
http://www.awpagesociety.com/

Organizations and Key Publics Homework
20 points

As we have mentioned in class, public relations is more properly labeled "publics" relations. Among the key publics for most organizations are employees, communities, investors, and consumers. This homework assignment is designed to give you the opportunity to explore the ways in which some corporations handle their communication with these important publics.

The process:

1. Choose a public that you're interested in (employees, investors, consumers, or the community).
2. Check out ONE of the following websites to see how the organization communicates with the public you've selected above. Please note that not every website addresses all the publics equally well. For example, some are better with employee information, others with community information, etc.

Organizations

Levi Strauss and Company: http: www.levistrauss.com

This site has human resource and corporate information, as well as recent press releases detailing layoffs and what the company plans to do for employees. There is also some consumer information on this site (corporate casual), plus links to Levis and Dockers online stores.

Chevron Company: http://www.chevron.com

This site contains information for career opportunities and benefits, and extensive investor and community relations pages. Since Chevron products are typically sold through third parties, there is not a lot of consumer information on this site.

Mary Kay Cosmetics: http://www.marykay.com

This site offers an extensive consumer relations area (how to use Mary Kay products), plus some investment information and community relations through the Mary Kay Foundation. (This page took a little while to download in the office; it will probably take even longer on a modem connection.)

Wal-Mart Corporation: http://www.wal-mart.com

This site is a consumer site where you can buy Wal-Mart products. But it also has links to Wal-Mart's corporate site, with investor relations, and the Wal-Mart Foundation, which is the source for community relations.

First Union Corporation: http://www.firstunion.com

This site features services for First Union customers, and investor relations page, and some career opportunities. There is also a page of First Union's community involvement and sports sponsorships. First Union announced layoffs just last week, so there are some employee issues that might be addressed via press releases.

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An alternative site for those interested in employee communication:

Ragan Communications: http://www.ragan.com

The Ragan Group is known more for employee communications than public relations (although its website touts both sides of the organization). For this assignment, check out the employee communication strategies page. On it are several case studies of employee communication. Examine them to answer the questions above.

Given the public you selected above, answer the following questions to evaluate the website:

1. What issue(s) or opportunity(ies) is this public facing? (For example, what issues are the employees at Levis facing?)
2. What strategy(ies) is the organization using to address these issues?
3. Do you think the messages address the public's concern?

Product: You should write a brief essay (no longer than 500-600 words) that addresses the questions above. You will be graded on the quality of your reasoning and support for your answer, the accuracy of the information used to support your answer, and the quality of your writing.

You may either email the essay or turn in a hard copy in class. The essay should be emailed to me by class time. In class, be prepared to discuss what you found.

Communities, Government and Activists Homework
20 points

Description: Public relations techniques are used to influence government and the public, by the government to influence you, and by candidates to become elected to higher office.

You have three choices for this assignment (choose only 1):

1. Visit the government or community websites listed below to see what issues the government is emphasizing and the messages being sent about those.
2. Visit the activist organizations' sites listed below to see what issues they're emphasizing and how they're communicating about them;
3. Visit the websites for the current frontrunners in the 2000 Presidential election campaign to see what issues they think are important at this point.

In all cases, you are to write a brief essay (no longer than 500-600 words) that addresses the questions below. You will be graded on the clarity of your ideas, quality of your reasoning and support for your answer, the accuracy of the information you use, and the quality of your writing.

You may either email the essay or turn in a hard copy in class. BE ADVISED: You are responsible for the reliability of your email delivery system. In class, be prepared to discuss what you learned. The homework is due MONDAY, APRIL 26.

Option 1: Government and Communities

Visit one of the following websites. Answer the following questions:

- What issues is this particular governmental agency or community emphasizing?
- What messages and information are they providing about this issue?
- Given what you have heard about this issue, do you think this agency's viewpoint is being accepted?

White House: http://www.whitehouse.gov

This site provides the President's most recent comments about current issues, including speeches and press conferences.

The U.S. House of Representatives: http://www.house.gov/

This is the general site for the House. You can search for your representative and his/her current issues, as well as what items top the legislative agenda. Note that there is still a link to the Independent Counsel's report on Monicagate.

The U.S. Senate: http://www.senate.gov/

See the instructions for the House.

Pennsylvania Home page: http://www.state.pa.us/

You need to be a little selective with this site. It features all kinds of information. You may want to look to the governor's pages, or maybe those of the legislative branch. If you'd like, you can see how PA is promoting itself through tourism.

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New Jersey State Home page: http://www.state.nj.us/

See the note above regarding Pennsylvania's home page.

Internal Revenue Service: http://www.irs.ustreas.gov/prod/

The IRS suffered major public criticism in the past year. A Congressional investigation revealed that agents regularly abused power, set "quotas" for audits, and generally mistreated taxpayers. This news update provides a hint at the ways this agency is rehabilitating itself. This link will take you to a mailbox; click it and you will go to the *Digital Daily*, a newsletter for IRS "customers."

U.S. Dept. of Education: http://www.ed.gov/

This is the agency that oversees education at all levels--including yours. See what policy initiatives are at the top of the agenda.

Option 2: Activists

Activists try to raise issues with the government and the public. The following organizations are involved with issues related to a specific public, problems they have with particular companies, or issues on the public agenda.

Visit one of the following websites and answer the following questions:

- What issues seem to be at the top of this organization's agenda?
- How are they communicating about those issues?
- Given what you know about current events, does this organization's issues seem important to the rest of the public? If not, what should the organization do?

American Association of Retired Persons: http://www.aarp.org/

Settle back into retirement? Don't bet your Geritol! The largest lobbying organization in the US is this group (which is rated one of the largest lobbyists). Check the legislative/issues page to find out what they're concerned about.

National Rifle Association: http://www.nra.org/

Another large lobbyist. Check out its legislative division for the issues currently on their docket. You may want to examine the NRA's reaction to losing a recent ballot initiative that would have allowed all Missouri citizens to carry concealed weapons.

Global Exchange—Nike Labor Campaign:
http://www.globalexchange.org/economy/corporations/nike/index.html

This is one of the organizations that raised an issue with Nike's labor practices. You may want to go to its home page to see what other issues its involved with.

Wal-Mart Sucks Homepage: http://www.walmartsucks.com/

This is almost more of a rumor-mill than a legitimate website--but it raises some questions about Wal-Mart practices. For a more legitimate site, check out the National Labor Committee, which has questioned Wal-Mart's use of textile workers.

Pax Christi USA: http://www.nonviolence.org/pcusa/

This is a national Catholic peace organization. Of the major peace organization's websites, this one has the most on the recent Kosovo war. You may want to note some of the other issues they're pursuing.

Option 3: The Candidates

The following have been dubbed the "front runners" nearly 18 months before a ballot is cast for the President. See what they think is important now.

Choose one of these sites and answer the following questions:

- What issues are on the candidate's agenda?
- Given what you know about current events, do you think these are appropriate issues or positions? If not, what should the candidate do?
- Given the quality of the message, how successful do you think this campaign will be?

Al Gore for President: www.algore2000.com
George W. Bush for President: www.georgewbush.com
Dan Quayle for President: http://www.quayle.org/
(Be sure to check for misspelled words)
Elizabeth Dole for President: www.edole.org
(This link was reported in *Time* magazine, but I have not been able to get it to work).
Steve Forbes for President: www.forbes2000.com
Bill Bradley for President: www.billbradley.com
Pat Buchanan for President: www.gopatgo2000.com

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Organizations and Crises Homework Assignment
20 points

For your final homework assignment of the semester, you are to explore what happens when things go wrong for an organization. As we will discuss in class, the best kind of crisis management is avoiding crises in the first place. However, an organization often is not judged by the crises it prevents, but by the way in which it responds to crises that happen.

Process:

Review the material on crisis management from the textbook. This will provide you some guidance for judging the quality of the messages.

Examine the websites from the following crises. Note that the events covered by the messages are in various stages of unfolding. The Columbine crisis, for example, is still unfolding. However, you can judge the initial response to the crisis at this point.

Columbine High School—Jefferson County School District: http://204.98.1.2/index.html

Certainly there is no greater recent tragedy than this. In class, we discussed how other schools should respond; here, you can see how Columbine itself has handled the problem. In addition to the messages directed to the media and others, you may also want to check out the support services ("offers of help", counseling) presented here--what we'll call the "operational response" in class.

As of this writing, the messages from the very first day of the crisis start at the bottom of Columbine High School update page—you should start there to see how the messages unfolded. The first statement was issued at 5:20 p.m., April 20, just about 5 hours after the shooting ended. Also note that messages of condolence are being handled by the Communications Office for Jefferson County Schools.

Amtrak http://www.amtrak.com

From earlier in the semester, Amtrak still has press releases relating to the wreck of the *City of New Orleans*. From the home page, follow the link titled "News and Views." Click on the "News Releases" link, and follow it to the March, 1999 news releases. Also note some very recent news releases (April 22) that announce the Amtrak conductor winning a national safety award.

For each of these crises, address the following questions:

- How did the organization respond to the crisis?
- How are the organizations addressing public safety issues that have arisen from the crisis?
- Do you have any specific suggestions about how the organization should communicate as it attempts to rebuild its relationships with publics?

You are to write a brief essay (no longer than 500-600 words) that addresses the questions above. You will be graded on the clarity of your ideas, quality of your reasoning and support for your answer, the accuracy of the information you use, and the quality of your writing.

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You may either email the essay or turn in a hard copy in class. BE ADVISED: You are responsible for the reliability of your email delivery system. In class, be prepared to discuss what you learned. The homework is due MONDAY, May 3.

Two other resources for crisis management—For your information:

Public Relations Society of America Professional Resources:
http://prsa.org/ppc/index.html
Under this index, go to "Tips and Techniques" and click on "Crisis Management." A pretty comprehensive list of crisis communication techniques.

The Institute For Crisis Management: http://www.crisisexperts.com/
This is the crisis consulting firm cited in your textbook. Several interesting studies on how crises develop, as well as some definitions of what a crisis is.

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